A LETTER

TO

THOMAS KEATE, Esq.

SURGEON-GENERAL TO THE ARMY,

ONE OF THE SURGEONS TO ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL,

&c. &c. &c.

WITH

SOME GENERAL REMARKS ON THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

OCCASIONED BY

THE APPROACHING ELECTION

OF

A SURGEON TO ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL,

VACANT BY

THE RESIGNATION

OF

CHARLES HAWKINS, Esq.

On the 9th of APRIL, 1800.

Tempora notis
Instruit exemplis, inopem solatur et ægrum.

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A LETTER,

&c.

London, April 17, 1800.

SIR,

THE important office and diſtinguiſhed ſtation which you hold in a profeſsion, in which the general welfare and ſafety of your fellow-creatures are ſo intimately concerned, juſtify the propriety of this addreſs to you on the preſent occaſion. As an attentive obſerver of the medical world, I have too often ſeen, that " riches are not always given

to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of ſkill;" but there is a certain power which ſeems to exerciſe their patience, and to ſport with their ingenuity. An Election, or rather a canvaſs for an Election, for the office of Phyſician or Surgeon to an Hoſpital is an example of this truth.

I confeſs myſelf aſtoniſhed, when I find that the inſtitutions of ſuch charities leave the Election in the hands of perſons, the great majority of whom are inadequate to form any idea of the ſpecific merits of the Candidates, and who have

no knowledge whatſoever of the great art itſelf. The man who poſſeſſes the gift of healing, as you know from Homer, was from all antiquity eſteemed a character ſecond to none in real worth and dignity. The voice of mankind has confirmed this early ſentence; and in this country, the true merit of a Profeſſor and the honour due to the ſcience have been commenſurate. Surgery is no longer connected with a ludicrous craft, nor does the wiſdom of a Phyſician conſiſt in exterior gravity, in the wig, or the cane. The Apothecaries indeed now ſhine like meteors, and the medical Chemiſts play

their public coruſcations; and ſometimes the united radiance of Lucina, Venus, and Mortaria * overpowers the ſenſe, till the Doctorate is loſt in the effulgence of a *Baronetage*. Every organ of our frame has now its appropriate Profeſſor. If we are dull or ſlow to hear, as we too often are, we have the Auriſt; if we ceaſe to ſee aright, as we too frequently do, none but the Oculiſt is competent to clear the eye. We have airs from heaven and blaſts from beneath, with every vital and caloric principle, which can invigorate or inflame us.

* The Goddeſs of the Apothecaries.

In the midſt of theſe contending parties, THE LONDON SURGEON, of a regular, conſiſtent, and *unmixed* practice, either obſtetric or pharmaceutic, ſtands alone, and has a combat to maintain, to which few are equal. It is our common intereſt to ſupport the character and the conſequence of *the liberal Surgeon.* He is deſerving of an honourable ſubſiſtence, and I feel that ſuch a ſentiment ſhould be called into efficacy and action. His eſſential province is invaded by every pretender and empiric, and if he finds no reſource in private patrimony, he is driven to the ſhop, the country, or the army. It is not poſſible for any young man to main-

tain

tain his ground in this town, however meritorious and inſtructed he may be, but by favour and patronage. The groves of Paphos and the Cyprian mountains are his retreat, where the ſtar of Venus glows and twinkles alternately; here *alone* the young Aſcanius may ſubſiſt, or repoſe,

Super alta *Cythera*,
Aut ſuper Idalium ſacratâ ſede *recumbat* *.

I believe, indeed, that the benevolence of this kingdom is more extenſive, and the application of it is made with greater accuracy and diſcernment, than at any former periods. The man of merit, nevertheleſs,

* *Recumbere*, is *to ſit at meat*; which, by *ſome few* perſons, is conſidered neceſſary for every Surgeon to do.

muſt

muſt often ſee the riſing glories and rattling equipages of his inferiors in ſcience; and muſt be content for a ſeaſon, till an opportunity calls his name alſo into public notice. You know, Sir, that the chief occaſions for this notice are the Vacancies in the offices of Phyſician or Surgeon to a great Hoſpital.

With the Hoſpital the Diſpenſary now co-operates, and very frequently the medical aſſiſtance is *gratuitous*, which, I conceive, *it never ſhould be* in any public Inſtitution. To every ſpecies of labour, ſcience, and ingenuity, exerted by profeſſional men for the public good, there should be an adequate price and reward. There

should always be a reciprocal duty, enforced by an honourable recompence, and by a proper ſanction and controul. Upon ſuch Vacancies, the young Surgeon is called forth, and his alacrity and labour in the canvaſs, joined to perſonal intereſt, are, as you well know, the *only* efficacious inſtruments of his ſucceſs.

The preſent mode of an Election precludes almoſt the poſſibility of profeſſional diſcernment in the Electors. For who are they? Scarce ten of them who are not extra-profeſſional. I have often conſidered this ſubject, and I think that an

alteration

alteration might be propoſed and adopted, if calm ſenſe and judgment were ſuffered to prevail in the diſcuſſion of it.

The Subſcribers and Governors of our great Hoſpitals are, happily for this kingdom, and for it's honour as well as it's ſupport, numerous and dignified. I am ſure that the buſineſs is beſt conducted by Committees; and indeed I believe it is the only method of conducting it with propriety and with effect. I ſhould apprehend that *Elections* alſo might be carried on in this manner, with advantage to the public, without confuſion or partiality, or mere intereſt and patronage. The Governors would meet every year in a body, on a certain

tain day, and elect a Committee of *Twenty-Four* Members, or of any other number which may be deemed more convenient, for the year, profeſſional and extra-profeſſional, who ſhould conſider the merits of the Candidates for any vacant offices, and for thoſe of Surgeon and Phyſician, and be empowered to elect the Succeſſors. I ſhould propoſe that no Election ſhould be made if the Candidate has not two thirds of the whole Committee of Twenty Four, or of any other number which may be appointed, in his favour. The intereſt of the Hoſpital would be then beſt conſulted, and a judgment could be formed with impartiality of the merits of the Candidates, and a deciſion made with firmneſs and diſcernment.

I know

I know but one material objection to this propoſal. It has been ſaid, that Subſcribers regard a Vote as a privilege, and that many would withdraw their names and ſupport from an inſtitution, if they were deprived of this right. I ſhould hardly conceive, Sir, that any Gentleman or Lady, who ſubſcribes ſimply from an honeſt thought of common good to all, on a patriotic and Chriſtian principle of true benevolence, could ever ſuffer an imaginary, and often a very troubleſome, privilege, to ſtand in the way of ſubſtantial advantage to the community.

I have

I have been told, Sir, that a young Phyſician of *your* Hoſpital, *Inſignis patriâ pariter virtute ſuâque*, ſaid, in a company where this queſtion was diſcuſſed, with that mildneſs and caution which he joins to diſtinguiſhed ſkill and profeſſional learning, that he feared ſuch a reaſon operated on the majority of Subſcribers, and that it might be dangerous to propoſe it. A Gentleman replied to that argument in terms ſimilar to thoſe which I have juſt made uſe of. The Phyſician agreed to the validity which ſuch reaſons ought to have on every mind which reflected upon public principle, and he thought that the meaſure would

would be effectual if it could be carried, and productive of ſolid benefit to this, and to every other uſeful and important Inſtitution on the ſame foundation.

Where there are Funds and Eſtates ſufficient for the maintenance of the Charity, independant of private munificence, this could be done without a murmur, and eſtabliſhed by legitimate authority. In ſuch an appointment of a Committee, an oath might be adminiſtered to the members, to execute the ſolemn trust repoſed in them with fidelity and impar-

tiality. At preſent a Vote is a matter of friendſhip, or acquaintance, or intereſt, without any reſpect to the real merit of the Candidates, all of whom are *ſuppoſed* to be qualified. I would give no improper freedom to my pen in the diſcuſsion of this ſubject, nor offer any opinion which would not ſuit with maturity of years and gravity of character. But, I think, the able and the philanthropic will find matter for their ſerious thoughts; and the reſult of their deliberation may be ſubmitted with reſpect for the ultimate deciſion of the Governors.

In

In the preſent inſtance, Sir, I think *ſome* of the Candidates are perhaps *too young* and inexperienced. I cannot ſuffer myſelf for a moment to conſider the election of any *very* young man, as a mere paſſport to public practice; for I look upon the office of Surgeon as a moſt ſolemn truſt, to be conferred on the moſt deſerving and the moſt diligent, for the ſake of the poor, the afflicted, the miſerable, the deſtitute, and the forlorn. We are aſſured, that *their cries will* at all times *pierce the ears of the* LORD OF SABAOTH. The medical offices therefore of an Inſtitution founded to HIS honour, in obedience to HIS word, and for the

relief of HIS creatures, ſhould be confided only to thoſe hands which have learned from experience to fulfil the duties of them. I always from my heart deſpiſed the ſarcaſtic ſeverity of the proverb, which affixes the imputation of irreligion on *our* profeſsion; for I am ſure there is no other which appeals more ſeriouſly, or points more diſtinctly, to the awful diſpenſations of Providence, to the arm of Omnipotence, and to the works of infinite wiſdom. I truſt theſe ſentiments, Sir, are congenial with your own.

There are many circumſtances which affect

affect a young Surgeon of talents and knowledge, who is desirous to rise in his profession in this town, if he is unbefriended by the great, or unprotected by his experienced Brethren. He must be respectful without servility, and steady without presumption. But he is bound to deliver his opinion with deference, yet with firmness, however it may disagree with that of the oldest practitioner. He must not too soon relinquish all the modes of former operators, nor too eagerly adopt, nor reject, what is absolutely new.

A young medical man will regard with

caution the riſing diſcoveries of the time, and the application of air and water with new and unheard-of efficacy. He will conſider the effects, and attend to the experiments, but muſt not inſtantly coincide with them.

If, for inſtance, he ſhould diſapprove the introduction of the new *beſtial* diſeaſe, he is to ſtate the arguments, reaſons, and facts which lead him to decline the practice of it. In ſo doing, he is not to fear the frown of an active and enterpriſing *medical Chemiſt*, nor the heels nor horns of the animal itſelf. The votary of *Sabrina* has indeed appeared at Court, and the "*Commutation*

"*Cow*"

Cow" on the lawns of St. James's. There is a paſſion for *Union* at preſent, and there is a moſt indiſpenſable neceſſity for it; but there is no neceſſity real or apparent, in my opinion, *to unite man with the beſtial herd*, and to introduce a new corruption or contamination into the human blood, for the final conſequences of which no man, however confident, can as yet anſwer.

A facetious Bard of the preſent day, I am told, has penned THE RAPE OF EUROPA, a Medical Allegory; but I know not of the fact. I do not often, like the very ingenious and acute Dr. FERRIAR, write verſes myſelf; but I once

replied in jeſt to the inflexible gravity of *Sir* EBENEZER OWLETT Bart. a ſtrong advocate for the Cow-Pox, when he preſſed his point with an earneſtneſs in proportion to the weakneſs of his argument.

Think not, my Owlet, thy fond friend is dull:
Ireland and Egypt may adore THE BULL,
We turn from APIS to his better half,
Which *Pearſon* calls a COW, and *Parr* (*a*) a Calf!

And with this I left Sir Ebenezer; but I do not recommend this poetical cuſtom to a young man. I adviſe him however at times to diſſent from his medical friends with pleaſantry and good humour, both in his expreſſions and in his countenance.

(*a*) An ingenious and able Surgeon, in the Country, who muſt not be miſtaken for the Rev. and learned Dr. SAMUEL PARR, who certainly never *yet* preached for *an hour and forty ſeven minutes* on the Cow Pox before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London.

Theſe

Theſe, Sir, are incidental topics; but I return to my Concluſion, and will plainly ſtate my opinion as it relates to *this* Hoſpital.

I would, above all other points, expreſs my ſtrongeſt reprobation of a cuſtom too frequent in many public Inſtitutions, and with which, I fear, this Hoſpital may be charged. A Phyſician, or a Surgeon, *may* give private intimation to his friends, of his intention to reſign, ſix weeks or two months before the time, and all legitimate Candidates, but the favoured perſon, may be deprived of the poſſibility of obtaining Votes, which are ſecured before hand by this indecorous practice. It is a mode dishonourable to a public

Inſtitution,

Inſtitution, indelicate and ungrateful in the Phyſician or the Surgeon who adopts it, it is ungentlemanly even in the idea, and diſgraceful alike to the Candidate and his Predeceſſor, it is fatal and deadly to the eſtabliſhment, and ſteals from thence *the life of the Building*. I have no notion of ſuch a race or conteſt; it is foreign to the honeſt nature of an Engliſhman.

You remember, Sir, that in the entrance to the Academia of Athens ſtood the Altar* of *Prometheus*. Every Candidate for the prize in the conteſt, inſtituted in that place, had a burning torch aſſigned him in ſucceſſion. The Victor ſtrove lawfully, and was therefore

* Pauſanias L. 1. Sect. 30.

crowned

crowned with honour. But in this medical contention, the fire burns not for all, and is acceſſible only to a *clandeſtine* Candidate. Near the ſame Academia, there was indeed an altar alſo to *Mercury*; but the chief ſacrifices were offered to the Muſes and Minerva. Your own ingenuity, Sir, will collect the ſenſe of the Allegory.

I would alſo obſerve, that much of the *original* principle of this Hoſpital ſhould be reconſidered and enforced; and the ſpirit of the time ſhould be watched by the honourable and independant Governors of this and of every other charity. Promiſes, Sir, may be mighty, but the performance, nothing.

Men

Men who have been tried in *your* ſervice and not found wanting, ſhould be regarded, brought forward, and eſtabliſhed; for in them alone can be placed ſecurity and confidence, and not in every interloper, or unfledged comrade of profeſſional men.

Is there a man of knowledge, of ſteady character, a good anatomiſt, an operator of ſkill and mercy, diligent and conſcientious in his attendance, and *wholly* in his profeſſion? If ſuch a man be young, or middle aged, or old, I reaſon well, when I ſay, let him be your Phyſician, or your Surgeon, according to the caſe, and you do your duty to the public.

It is a known truth in every ſpecies of Government,

vernment, which will adopt the cuſtom, that "Committees always conduct affairs with convenience, and generally with preciſion." I have enlarged on this topic, and hope that all the departments of all public Inſtitutions will ſee their indiſpenſable neceſſity.

I muſt alſo own, that in my opinion, no Medical Gentleman, who has been bred up in any *other* Hoſpital, ſhould offer himſelf a Candidate on this occaſion, as it infers what is diſreputable to you. If indeed a Surgeon practiſes pharmacy, and ſells drugs, he is abſolutely diſqualified as a Candidate, and is *ineligible*. I could alſo wiſh, that no perſon ſhould offer himſelf who has not been many years a pupil of the Hoſpital, and who has not reſided *as Houſe Surgeon*, for a complete

year.

year. If any perſon of that deſcrip-tion has performed the arduous and fa-tiguing duties of that moſt important office, with diligence, ſelf-denial, and unceaſing attendance, by the teſtimony of all thoſe who knew him to be ſuch in the daily diſcharge of his function; that man is a legitimate Candidate for your favour and choice. When all other points are equal, the man of the longeſt ſtanding is intitled to your preference; and it is juſt and wiſe that he ſhould be ſo.

I am ſorry that you ſhould have recourſe to *Aliens*, either for a Phyſician or for a Surgeon to St. George's Hoſpital, at any time, but eſpecially when men of undoubted ability may be found among you. The friends and

patrons

patrons of St. Bartholomew's, St. Thomas's, or of Guy's Hoſpital would reject ſuch a conduct, with an indignant contempt.

As to yourſelf, Sir, whether you *intend* to benefit the Inſtitution by your continuance, or to give it cauſe for regret by your reſignation, you ought to conſider deeply and ſeriouſly, as becomes your high profeſsional ſtation, whom you will *recommend* for your ſucceſſor, and into whoſe hands you will deliver the truſt and charge. It is a matter of conſcience and of *much delicacy*; and you will take this admonition as it comes home to *your own* buſineſs and boſom: for I ſpeak upon ſound, broad, and general principles.

Next

Next to this, ſtrive to reject the introduction of an *Alien*, and preſerve the internal dignity of your Hoſpital, and the character which it ſhould hold forth to them who are without.

THE PATRON OF ENGLAND has always diſtinguiſhed, protected, and cheriſhed *his own* offspring; and never let it be ſaid of THE MEDICAL ST. GEORGE, in the ſevere and *expiring* words of the royal Numidian, that "HE HAD ADOPTED ABLER CHILDREN THAN HE HAD BRED HIMSELF."*(a)*

With every good wiſh to You and the Inſtitution, believe me your Friend and faithful Servant,

MEDICINÆ STUDIOSUS.

(*a*) *Meliores Liberos* SUMPSISSE, quam *genuiſſe*. Salluſt. Bell. Jugurth. Orat. Micipſæ, Sect. 10.

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